

Senate tenure, he has been a partner on such issues as voter protection, the USA PATRIOT Act and FISA reform, and empowering the National Guard.

Alaska has more veterans per capita than any other State. As a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Senator BEGICH has fought to improve veterans access to care, increase funding for the VA, and for research to better understand mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, and traumatic brain injury, TBI. These are priorities I share as well. He has also worked through the commerce committee to ensure that Alaska's many fisheries and their booming industry remain sustainable. His commitment to his constituents similarly extended to his work on the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, where he fought to protect native voters from discrimination and to ensure that laws reflect and respect their needs and traditions.

I have appreciated the opportunity to work with Senator BEGICH on some of the unique challenges that face rural states like Vermont and Alaska. Senator BEGICH has consistently worked to improve rural schools through legislation such as his Investing in Innovation for Education Act, which I was pleased to cosponsor and which would have given 25 percent of its grants to rural schools. Senator BEGICH has supported legislation to facilitate rural Alaskans' access to quality health care. And he has supported measures to address the high heating costs facing our northern constituents.

He is a man with an unfailing optimistic outlook on life. I wish Senator BEGICH, his wife Deborah, their young son Jacob, and his entire family best wishes.

JOHN WALSH

Madam President, Senator JOHN WALSH has served but a brief time in the Senate, but he came to this body with a long history of public service. A decorated veteran, he enlisted in the Montana National Guard in 1979, and he rose through the ranks, ultimately being selected as Montana's adjutant general. He is the first veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars to serve as a Senator, and during his tour of duty, he earned the Bronze Star, the Legion of Merit, and the combat infantry badge.

As a Senator, JOHN WALSH has been a strong advocate of mental health care for veterans, preserving native languages, and bringing outsourced jobs back to the United States. As cochair of the Senate National Guard Caucus, I recognize and greatly appreciate his deep understanding and strong support for the Guard, its needs, and its future.

I wish him, his wife Janet, and their children and grandchild all the best in the next chapter of their lives.

SAXBY CHAMBLISS

Madam President, in Senator SAXBY CHAMBLISS, Georgians have had a diligent voice in Congress for nearly 20 years. We may not always agree, but I

have appreciated his willingness to cross the aisle on such important issues as budget priorities and agriculture policy.

Senator CHAMBLISS is the former chairman and ranking member of the Senate agriculture committee. In his time in Congress, Senator CHAMBLISS has participated in enactment of four bipartisan omnibus agriculture bills, the most recent of which is the 2014 farm bill. He played an important role in reforming the Crop Insurance Program and has been an advocate for supporting the Nation's agricultural sector. I have particularly appreciated his support for critical conservation and forestry programs.

Senator CHAMBLISS was recognized as a key legislator in the 2011 discussions surrounding deficit reduction. He has been an active member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a strong supporter of the National Guard. Through his tenure, he has been a steadfast representative for the people of Georgia, and one prominent publication in the State gave him the title "Georgian of the Year" in 2009.

Senator CHAMBLISS will retire at the end of this Congress, and I wish him, his wife Julianne, their children, and grandchild all the very best.

TOM COBURN

Madam President, while several Members of this Senate class will be retiring this year at the end of their terms, another Senator will also be taking his leave of this Chamber, in the midst of his current term. For a decade, Senator TOM COBURN has represented his constituents in Oklahoma with steadfast dedication and perseverance. He and I have not always agreed, but I have always respected and admired his commitment to his principles.

Senator COBURN has built a record and reputation as a fiscal hawk, reminiscent in some ways of the role that the late Senator Howard Metzenbaum of Ohio assumed for many years in the Senate. Senator COBURN can be a tough bargainer, and sometimes he has chosen not to seek or accept compromise at all. But he also has shown the ability to work across the aisle, whether on reducing government spending or promoting transparency in government. In the first Congress in which he served in the Senate, he partnered with then-Senator Barack Obama and others to author the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, which established a public, online database detailing Federal spending. For many years he served as an active member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, where we worked together on such policy issues as patent reform, copyright protections, and support for law enforcement.

Senator COBURN is a longtime public servant for the State of Oklahoma. Members retire from Congress for a host of reasons, and I know Senator COBURN's retirement has been hastened. He has left his mark on this in-

stitution, and I wish him, his wife Carolyn, their three daughters and their grandchildren good health and all the best in TOM COBURN's retirement from the Senate.

MIKE JOHANNIS

Madam President, it is not uncommon for Senators to leave this Chamber to serve in Cabinet positions. Senator MIKE JOHANNIS, however, brought that executive branch experience with him when he was elected by the people of Nebraska to represent them in the Senate. A former mayor, Governor, and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Senator JOHANNIS has served at every level of government.

While we have often supported competing proposals, we have found important and meaningful places to work together. Senator JOHANNIS joined me in coauthoring legislation to improve the Food for Peace program, helping to feed an additional 200,000 people in dire need. Serving on the agriculture committee together, we are both committed to farming, family farming, and supporting our Nation's agriculture sectors and the people and communities that are part and parcel of farming and food production in America. Senator JOHANNIS has also been an important advocate for veterans, working on programs to help returning soldiers find civilian employment.

I wish Senator JOHANNIS, his wife Stephanie, and their family the very best in this next chapter of their lives.

MURTHY NOMINATION

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I wish to congratulate Dr. Vivek H. Murthy on his confirmation as the 19th Surgeon General of the United States.

Earlier today, the U.S. Senate held a series of votes in order to confirm Dr. Vivek H. Murthy as Surgeon General of the United States. The first vote was held to invoke cloture on his nomination, the second to confirm. Dr. Murthy was successfully confirmed by a vote of 51-43.

My flight from Cleveland to Washington, DC was delayed causing me to miss both votes. Had I been present, I would have voted to support Mr. Murthy's nomination.

President Obama nominated Dr. Murthy for this position last November. Dr. Murthy's extensive experience as an entrepreneur, health professional, and public health advocate make him an exceptionally well qualified candidate for Surgeon General. Although I was unable to make it to DC in time to vote to help confirm Dr. Murthy, I would have voted to support his confirmation.

Dr. Vivek H. Murthy will be an exemplary Surgeon General, and it is for this reason that I wrote to President Obama asking that he nominate Dr. Murthy for this position. His long record of innovative business leadership and unwavering belief in a more inclusive health care system advance our Nation's public health agenda.

I look forward to working with Dr. Murthy in his role as Surgeon General.

VOTE EXPLANATION

• Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, due to previous commitments in Florida today, I was unable to cast the following four votes:

Motion to invoke cloture on the nomination of Dr. Vivek Hallegere Murthy to be U.S. Surgeon General, as well as a final vote to confirm him. On both occasions, I would have voted no. I oppose Dr. Murthy's nomination because he has never served in the uniformed services, and one of the primary duties of the Surgeon General is to command the entire Commissioned Corps of uniformed public health officers. I am opposed to his advocacy efforts to weaken the constitutional rights of law-abiding Americans as enshrined in the 2nd Amendment to the Constitution;

Motion to invoke cloture on the nomination of Daniel Santos to be a Member of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board. I would have voted no; and

Motion to invoke cloture on the nomination of Frank A. Rose to be an Assistant Secretary of State. I would have voted no. •

OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I wish to clarify my understanding of the following report language included with H.R. 83, the Omnibus Appropriations Act:

The Secretary is directed to operate the marketing assistance loan program in a way that encourages redemption and minimizes forfeitures of loan commodities to the Federal government, and enables the orderly marketing of loan commodities throughout the year. Further, the Secretary shall ensure that the marketing assistance loan program remains a viable tool for all producers to use in marketing loan commodities freely and competitively.

The Senate Agriculture Committee has confirmed this language simply intends to encourage USDA to better inform farmers of the status of any marketing loan gains they may receive during a marketing year for eligible commodities.

Furthermore, it was also conveyed by minority staff of the Senate Agriculture Committee that the referenced language in no way seeks to change implementation or enforcement of Section 1603 of the Agricultural Act of 2014.

• Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, I wish to thank Chair MIKULSKI for her tireless work in keeping our government open for another year. I understand Chair MIKULSKI and Ranking Member SHELBY have worked hard on this bill.

In the big picture, this bill continues to honor our commitment to our veterans by allowing advance funding for Veterans Administration accounts so they are locked in a year in advance, ending uncertainty. This bill also pro-

vides desperately needed funds to respond to and prepare for Ebola at its epicenter. This bill keeps faith with the American people who dream of a better life by increasing Pell Grants and making college more affordable. It creates jobs by strengthening our infrastructure, building roads and bridges, to keep the economy moving, and helps develop our economy by investing in research in agriculture, health, and geosciences, among other areas.

I am glad that the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program was fully funded at \$40 million. The program is one of the successes in collaboration and forest management and deserves strong support. The Land and Water Conservation Fund—LWCF—also received sustained funding at the same level as last year. Although this is only one-third of the total authorized for LWCF, I am pleased that the program received consistent funding and I remain hopeful that we will fully fund this program in the future. I am also glad that the National Park Service received \$10 million for the Centennial Challenge. As the National Park Service moves into celebrating its centennial, it is so important that our parks receive the care and attention they need.

However, I also have to voice my disappointment over a number of provisions included in H.R. 83, as well as several provisions that were blocked from inclusion in H.R. 83. Keeping the government running is imperative but it should not come at the cost of stripping the rights of voters, further chipping away at what is left of our eroding campaign finance laws, and rolling back Dodd-Frank protections meant to reduce taxpayer risk from “too-big-to-fail” entities, just to name a few of the objectionable provisions in this bill.

One such provision greatly expands donations to the Republican and Democratic parties by allowing a tenfold increase in the maximum amount that donors may contribute to their political party's various national committees in one election cycle. The donation amounts skyrocket from \$32,400 to \$324,000 per year and ultimately up to a total contribution of \$1.5 million to a party per each 2-year election cycle. At a time when more and more Americans are convinced our political system is rigged toward the rich, this provision only confirms that view.

This bill also contains a provision that will put taxpayers back on the hook for big banks by rolling back the regulatory protections that Congress put into place in response to the financial crisis that devastated our economy in 2008. With the Dodd-Frank Act, Congress sought to ensure that high-stakes gambling on Wall Street by reckless risk takers would not threaten the livelihood of the American taxpayer. As part of this effort, Dodd-Frank included a provision known as the “swaps push out” which requires Federally insured banks to separate out

their riskiest activities into subsidiaries. This way, the risky trading activities that contributed to the meltdown would be separated from the insured banking entity and ensure that banks—not taxpayers—would be responsible if risky trades fail. Today, this spending bill repeals that provision and once again potentially leaves the taxpayer on the hook for Wall Street gambling gone wrong.

I am particularly dismayed that last-minute partisan maneuvering has left America's rural counties in the dust. Two funds that are lifelines for cash-strapped rural counties and school districts struggling to fund basic education, road improvements, law enforcement, and other public services were hurt by this bill. First, House Republican Leadership blocked repeated efforts to include the Secure Rural Schools—SRS—funding program, though it came with offset funding. Instead, they split it from the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program—PILT—funded PILT, and left SRS behind. This is a problem for two distinct reasons. First, PILT is a laudable program for rural counties around the country who host our public lands. But so is SRS, which funds education, roads and critical services in more than 700 counties across the country, and these counties will now be forced to lay off teachers, close libraries and jails, and lay off sheriffs. Second, PILT's formula is connected with SRS funding levels, in fact, and while this bill includes funding for PILT, in the absence of Secure Rural Schools, the funding level for PILT provided in this bill actually reduces PILT payments as compared to last year. We have seen this movie before and it never ends well—a last-minute scheme worked out largely in private to solve a complex problem without the full and public consideration of Congress—leads to mistakes. This is one of those mistakes that will reverberate across rural America. I am disappointed this mistake was not averted simply by providing SRS funding.

Speaking of hampering rural America, there is another provision missing that would help the rural West and one missing that would help the rural West were it included. This package fails to include the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act—a bill I introduced with my colleague Senator CRAPO and 17 additional bipartisan cosponsors, and which was also a strong bipartisan measure in the House. This legislation would have solved the problem of paying for the ever-increasing costs of fighting wildland fires without decimating the agencies' core budgets, where they get the money to pay for their essential work—including the forest restoration work that can help us get ahead of these infernos. Our commonsense solution would have paid for these natural disasters like other natural disasters are paid for, instead of cannibalizing the agencies' budgets.

In addition, this bill interferes with the work that private landowners are